

Project Impact: First Year

by Linda Muse, SES Benefit Specialist

The Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach Program in Massachusetts (Project IMPACT), authorized by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 has successfully completed their first year of operation. This five-year grant was awarded to MRC through the Statewide Employment Services Department. The program's aim is to offer accurate and comprehensible program information to Social Security beneficiaries and assist planning for and accessing information regarding Social Security Work Incentives, Medical Benefits, Transitional Assistance, Public Housing, Worker's Compensation and other benefits.

The grant currently has five Benefit Specialists who are available to provide Individualized Work Incentives planning and assistance to MRC consumers. The Benefits Specialists have been reaching and offering services to MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Area Offices, Independent Living Centers, other State agencies, and various vendors throughout the grants catchment areas.

The first year has shown our Benefit Specialist to be quite active having completed 331 Individual Benefit Plans for consumers! We are number one in completing Plans per Benefit Specialist in the country! Already this year, we are 10% ahead of our projected goals for the fiscal year.

Project Staff continue to reach out to people with disabilities who receive benefits. For those consumers to whom successful employment appears to be a frightening maze of dealing with changes in federal and state benefits, we anticipate that our assistance can make this maze less stressful. Being aware of available Work Incentives, changes in housing regulations such as a new Income Exclusion for certain Public and Subsidized Housing beneficiaries, and Health Insurance regulations can allow consumers to make informed choices about work. Continued technical assistance through Cornell University offers us the latest information about changes in Federal and State programs.

We hope you will continue to use Project IMPACT in order to assist your consumers to access accurate and understandable information about their SSDI/SSI benefits. We can be reached at 1-800-734-7475 or on the MRC website: www.mass.gov/mrc/ses/impact.htm